THE KARENS OF BURMA

I

BACKGROUND

101 175 THE Karen people of Burma are now the second most important tribe in the country; but one hundred years ago they were called by their more powerful Burman neighbours the "Wild Cattle of the Hills".

At that time they were unorganized and lived in the dense forests that covered the country, especially in the ranges of hills that afforded them protection. They had no written language and were held in bondage to the fears that made their lives stagnant and prevented their changing the customs that they had received from their ancestors.

181 131 361 563 186 They were not an aggressive people and sought security in withdrawal from the rivers, which in those days were the only lines of communication, and they built their small villages high up in the hills or other places difficult of access. Here they lived in poverty but not without hope that some day their descendants would have better times. But now like hunted birds they admonished their children as they squatted at their rude low tables to eat their rice, "Eat fast, eat fast. The Burmans may come!"

173 171 Their origin is obscure. They have no written records and the destructive wet climate has obliterated almost all

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173 traces of their ancestry. Probably they originated in China
171 and came into Burma from the north-east in about the sixth or seventh century of the Christian era. Their language and personal characteristics would seem to indicate this.

● 101 The derivation of the term "Karen" is uncertain. It is the name by which this people have been called by the Burmese. The name by which they call themselves is *Pga K' Nyaw* which may be of Chinese origin and means "Men". They are the only real men. All other peoples are designated by their name as "Burman", "English", and so on.

II

DISTRIBUTION

101 The only part of Burma that can be called Karen
131 country is that lying eastward from Toungoo. Here in
563 the mountains the villages have never been dominated by their more powerful Burman neighbours and in several sections they retain their Karen names. In other sections they are known by Burmese names and show the influence of their having been overpowered at some time.

101 On the eastern slopes of the ranges which are dominat-
631 ed by Mt. Nattaung (called by the Karens *Thaw Thi*) are the three small independent states the chiefs of which are Karens. They belong to the Red Karen tribes and are called in Burmese Karen-ni. These states are Bawlekeh, Kyetpogyi and Kantarrawaddi and do not comprise a part of Burma politically except that they owe their security to the British Government with whom they haye treaty relations established by the early Deputy Commissioners of Toungoo.

There are a few Karens in the ranges of hills as far

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There are a few Karens in the ranges of hills as far north as a line running through Thayetmyo and Pyinmana. 101 131 To the east, Loikaw is a Karen district and Karens are found farther eastward in Thailand. For the most part the Karens share their localities with the Burmans and Shans. Their villages are now found scattered over the plains as well as the hills in Lower Burma all the way from Pyinmana to Victoria Point and from Arakan to some indefinite line in Thailand. It has been reported that there are a few scattered Karen communities even as far east as Cambodia, but they have been pretty well absorbed by the more aggressive surrounding races.

During the unsettled Burmese times they clung to the hills and the remote forests for their security and wrested a precarious living there, but with the more peaceful conditions brought about by the settled British Government they spilled over into the plains and, clearing tracts of forest for villages and tracts for paddy fields, they settled down and became prosperous. Therefore they may now be found in every district of Lower Burma. In such sections as around Bassein, Pyapon, Pegu, Thaton, Moulmein, and Tavoy they comprise a very considerable minority of the population. 178 361 104 433

In the hills the Karen villages are usually at the top of a ridge. The houses are close together and in some places they are surrounded by a stockade of bamboo with sharp pickets pointing outward to reinforce the fence. There are seldom more than twenty to thirty houses in a village. 361

When they build on the plains they usually select a site away from the roads where they will attract least attention and be free from intrusion. Often in the villages there is little attempt at orderly arrangement of the houses.

10: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1945 AP1 Burma
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177 181 797 them a language that might denationalize them. But when they sought outside teachers who would instruct them in English, the missionaries agreed to carry on schools in that language, and there grew up the Anglo-Vernacular system (English combined with the vernaculars, Burmese and Karen) that reached up to the 153 871 University with its degrees. Karen students usually are slower to grasp new ideas than Burmans, but they often retain them better and have been, in proportion to their numbers, just as good students as any other race in the country. When they get over their reticence and fears they seem to be able to succeed in any endeavour for which they have the aptitude.

186 582 The Karens are often accused of being clannish. They are, but it is their natural self-interest which leads them to cling to each other for protection from their more powerful neighbours. For the same reason they condemn marriage outside the tribe.

181 152 ●101 Although physically the Karen seems to an outsider closely to resemble the Burman, he has many very different racial characteristics which make it difficult for the two peoples to understand each other. The Burman is much like his own national emblem, the peacock, given to show and to a great appreciation of fine feathers. He likes to do things quickly and not too thoroughly. He watches those whom he desires to please and caters to their tastes. He uses many honorifics and is diplomatic in his language and manner. He often wears a silk *longyi* of dainty colours over a body that is rough and unwashed.

The Karen wears his dirty clothes over his unwashed person and feels that the two go together. He cares nothing for personal appearance. He is abrupt in his

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language and not much given to servility. Direct in his speech and with his mind easily upset by panic and timidity, he is often what we would call impolite and very undiplomatic. He makes no effort to show himself to his best advantage but has a sort of "take it or leave it" attitude that often gets him into trouble. This makes him all the more desirous of shunning those with whom he feels that he cannot compete. This is another reason why he sought the jungles and the hills.

Many early writers on the Karens have described them as devoid of humour. This can easily be explained when one understands the fears with which they surrounded everything. They were struck with terror by Government officers and other aggressive Europeans, with their strange appearance and ways. They did not dare to laugh for they did not understand what was supposed to be a joke. Therefore they preserved poker faces and seemed dumb and dead. The writer has spent many hours with them when the flow of humour and the joyous laughter were as spontaneous and happy as among any people he was ever with. Stories, practical jokes, wise-cracks came as quickly and merrily as in any language. But a man must have their confidence and know their language if he would enjoy himself among them.

There is a naivety among the Karens that is often very refreshing. They do not seem to be able to plot involved schemes for deceiving their neighbours. When they do attempt such things their simple plots usually fail. There is a simplicity among them that makes one feel a genuine friendliness when with them. One is usually safe in leaving one's luggage in their houses. Pedlars most often sleep at Karen houses when they can, for they

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PREFACE

To many a visitor to Burma, who views the country from the deck of an Irrawaddy River steamer or from the window of a railway carriage, there appears to be little difference between the Karen and the Burman. This is not strange, for many individuals of the non-Burman tribes wear the Burmese costume and speak the Burmese language; and they present no markedly different characteristics in feature or color of skin. I have often heard the remark that "there is no difference between the Burman and the Karen." It is doubtless because the Government of Burma recognizes that there is a difference in the tribal characteristics, customs, and religion that it has adopted the wise policy of publishing a series of complete studies, of which this purports to be one, of these various peoples. If the reader will have the patience to read these pages, it is hoped that he will realize that, though the Karen have lived for generations in the closest proximity to the Burmese, they preserve their own racial traits, which are quite distinct from those of their more volatile neighbors with whom they have had little in common.

This work deals more particularly with the Sgaw branch of the Karen people. My own acquaintance has been more intimate with this tribe, though I have known many of the other groups. This circumstance, together with the fact that the Bwe and Taungthu peoples have already been described in the *Upper Burma Gazetteer*, as well as the limitations of space, has led me to limit my discussion to brief references to the other tribes. But I am convinced that in the main the Sgaw exhibit the general characteristics that are truly Karen in the broadest sense of the term. I have also omitted any detailed study of the large mass of Karen folklore, which may possibly be incorporated in some future study.

The reader may notice that I have used the term "Karen," instead of the more usual plural form "Karens," when referring to the tribal name. This is more accurate, for to add the "s" is as misleading in this case as in that of the Lao, who are often mistakenly spoken of as the "Laos." In the transliteration of Karen words I have followed the continental system of spelling, adopting "x" for the guttural which is pronounced like the "ch" in the Scotch "loch," and the dipthong "eu" for the sound which closely resembles

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the common pronunciation of "er" as in "her." I have accepted the simplified spelling for the tribal names, Pwo and Bwe, in place of the more cumbersome "Pgho" and "Bghai."

It is not without some misgivings that I allow these sheets to go to the publisher. The notes were collected at such intervals as could be taken from my labors as a district missionary, and that at a time when increasing administrative duties precluded my giving such attention to them as I could wish. The return to America on furlough necessitated the completion of the work on the opposite side of the world from the sources of my material, and where, though I enjoyed the privileges of a Graduate Fellowship at the Ohio State University, I had to depend largely on my personal collections, there being no department of Ethnology there.

I wish to acknowledge the assistance which I have had from my wife, whose sympathetic interest and accurate knowledge have been of untold value, and also the help I have received from my missionary colleagues, among whom I should mention my father-in-law, Rev. D. A. W. Smith, D.D.; Rev. C. A. Nichols, D.D., who was first to ask me to undertake the preparation of this work, and Rev. E. N. Harris. Among the many Karen members of the mission staff who have helped in the gathering of materials, I can only mention Thras San Gyi San Kwe, Po Myaing, and Shwe Thee, of Tharrawaddy; Thra Pan Ya Se, of Shwegyin; and Thra Aung Gaing, of Insein, who gave me a full account of the Karen of Siam. The sketches signed "D. P." are the work of a Karen schoolboy from Tavoy, Saw Day Po, who, to his credit it should be said, drew them without having had any instruction in drawing whatever. My thanks are also due to Drs. B. Laufer and Fay Cooper-Cole, of the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, for many valuable suggestions, and to Professors J. A. Leighton and W. H. Siebert, of the Ohio State University, for many kindnesses. To Professor Siebert I am especially indebted for a most painstaking review of my entire manuscript, for its acceptance for publication, and for seeing it through the press of the Ohio State University. Finally, I desire to express my gratitude to the Government of Burma for the privilege of undertaking this work. The necessity for careful observation and thorough investigation has not been without its benefits to me. The undertaking has been exacting and quite instructive, even if it had benefited no one but myself.

This book is, after all, but another by-product of the great missionary enterprise, which seeks to lift the less fortunate peoples of

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CHAPTER I

HABITAT AND TRIBAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE KAREN

101 131 The Karen are a group of Indo-Chinese tribes living principally in Burma, the easternmost province of the British Indian Empire, in the Indo-Chinese peninsula, and in the adjoining country of Siam to the east. They are found between the tenth and twenty-first degrees of north latitude and between the ninety-fourth and one hundredth degrees of east longitude. The greater part of this territory they occupy in connection with the other peoples of the country, namely, the Burmese, Shan, Siamese, and Chin. 642 The only exclusively Karen country is the hilly region of the Toungoo district and the Karenni subdivision, where the Karen chiefs 161 of five states, comprising 4,830 square miles and a population of 42,240, are still in power under the Advisory Council of the British [583] Government. There is also a Karen chief ruling one of the Shan States, and five other states in that section are ruled by Taungthu chiefs. In all these latter districts we find a mixed population.[1]

101 197 The whole group of Karen tribes can be divided into three divisions, according to their language or dialect differences. These are the Sgaw, Pwo, and Bwe groups.

The Sgaw group is the largest and most widely scattered. They are found all through the Irrawaddy Delta, from the vicinity of Prome southward, and from the Arracan coast eastward to the neighborhood of Lakong in Siam and southward to the lowest point of the British possessions. The Paku and Mawnepgha tribes of the southern Toungoo Hills belong to this group. One dialect, with only slight variations, is used throughout this region.

The Pwo group comprises, besides the Pwo Karen, the Taungthu tribe, who call themselves the Pao. The Pwo are found along the seacoast from Arracan to Mergui and are said to be found nowhere more than fifty miles inland. However, I think that some of the Pwo villages in the Henzada district may be a little farther inland than that. The Taungthu are found in a section of country

[1] J. S. Scott: Burma, Appendix, pp. 470-481.

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running northward from Thaton into the Shan States beyond Taunggyi.

The Bwe tribes are found in the vicinity of Toungoo, in the territory extending from the foothills east of that city throughout the Karenni subdivision. This is a very mountainous region, and we find the people broken up into small tribes differing from one another in dialect, dress, and customs. Nine of these tribes were enumerated in the last Government census. The tendency of the present time is to consider these tribes more closely related than was formerly the case.

In the *Census Report* of the Government of India for the year 1911 we have the first enumeration of all Karens in the British territory. In former reports the Karenni territory was not included in the enumeration. The returns in 1911 showed a population of 1,102,695. This was an increase of 199,334 over the previous count in 1901, due in part to the increased extent of the territory covered. The enumeration, however, did not clearly distinguish between the Pwo and Sgaw branches of the race, due, as the *Report* says, to the fact that many returned themselves simply as Karens, without specifying to which branch they belonged. The total number of Pwos and Sgaws increased from 717,859 souls in 1901 to 872,825 in 1911, a gain of 154,966. This represents a real increase in population, for these tribes are all in Burma proper. The Pwo dialect is less persistent than the Sgaw, for more of its members are using Burmese to a much greater degree than the Sgaws, although the latter are also giving up their language where they are living in close contact with the Burmans. The Sgaw dialect is not "driving out the Pwo" as rumor says, but is merely holding its own better against the Burmese. Probably there are about half a million Sgaws in Burma and perhaps another 50,000 in Siam,[2] which would make them the most numerous branch of the race. The Taungthu were enumerated by themselves and, as has been said above, belong to the Pwo group. There were 183,054 of them in 1911. During the decade previous to that enumeration they had made an increase of 14,753 souls. The Pwo group would probably include altogether about 350,000 members and would stand second in point of numbers.[3]

[2] W. A. Graham, in the *Handbook of Siam*, estimates the Karen of that country at 50,000, but I think this estimate rather low.

[3] These citations are all from the *Census of India*, 1911, Vol. IX, pp. 275, ff.

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161 The Bwe group is more definitely treated in the *Census Report*, for in this group each tribe is enumerated separately, as follows:

Karenni	19,008
Karennet	3,721
Karenbyu	790
Zayein	4,981
Sinsin	533
Bre	6,911
Mano	1,445
Yinbaw	911
Padaung	8,516
Total	46,816

These tribes,[4] dwelling in the heart of the Karen country where they have been secure in the fastnesses of their native hills, have never before been counted with enough exactness to allow us to estimate their increase in numbers. There is no doubt that the general impression that they are really increasing is correct. Further investigation may show that some of these tribes as, for example, the Zayein, may be allied to non-Karen stock, such as the Wa of the Shan States.[5]

These Bwe tribes form a distinct group, but it is beyond the purpose of this present work to deal in particular with them, especially since they have already formed the subject of a study incorporated in the *Upper Burma Gazetteer*.[6]

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[4] Karenni means literally Red Karen, in Burmese. It has been used of the tribe dwelling in the country now called by that name, because they wear red clothing. Similarly some writers have spoken of the White Karen and the Black Karen, "Karenbyu" and "Karennet."

[5] Rev. W. H. Young, formerly of Kenteung, tells me that the Wa language resembles the Karen in structure but not in vocabulary, while the Lahu and Pwo Karen have similar customs and vocabulary but a different sentence structure.

[6] Vol. I, Pt. I, Chapter IX.

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water flowing with sand."[3] The reference to the Gobi Desert seems rather far-fetched and has, therefore, been abandoned by scholars. Dr. D. C. Gilmore suggests the Salween as being a river that fulfils the requirements of the tradition, but bases his conclusions largely on the reference to the early home of "Htaw Meh Pa" as located on Mount "Thaw Thi," the Olympus of the Karen, which is mentioned in Dr. Vinton's version of the story, from which he quotes.[4] This reference is not found in other versions of the story and was probably not a part of it in its earliest form. It seems reasonable, therefore, to look further for the sandy river. Dr. Laufer[5] asserts that the early home of the peoples of eastern Asia was in the upper reaches of the Hoang-ho or Yellow River, of China, and that from this center the Tibetans migrated westward; the early tribes of Indo-China, southward; and the Chinese, southeastward. According to this view, the progenitors of the Karen probably formed a part of the southward migration and, at some stage of their march, stopped on the banks of the Yellow River which, as its name suggests, has from time immemorial been freighted with silt and sand. Here they may have tried to cook the shellfish referred to in the tradition. From this region they doubtless made their way down to what is now Yunnan, where perhaps they found a domicile till they were pushed farther south by migrating people advancing behind them.

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The name "Karen" is an imperfect transliteration of the Burmese word "Kayin," the derivation of which has puzzled students of that language. It has been thought that this word is derived from the name by which the Red Karen call themselves, *i.e.*, "Ka-Ya." The designation of the Sgaw for themselves is "Pgha K'Nyaw," which has not usually been associated with the native name of the Red Karen. In August, 1914, it was suggested to me[6] that these tribal names, which have hitherto been thought to mean simply "men," were related to, and derived from, the name of one of the four ancient tribes of China, that is, the Ch'iang (ancient pronunciation, Giang or Gyang). This tribe, which is indicated in Chinese by the ideograph of a man combined with the character designating a sheep, conveying the meaning of shepherd, occupied

[3] E. B. Cross, *Journal, American Oriental Soc.* (1854) Vol. IV, pp. 296, ff. and D. C. Gilmore, *Journal, Burma Research Soc.*, Vol. I, p. 191.

[4] J. B. Vinton, D.D. and Rev. T. Than Bya, M. A., *Karen Folklore Stories.*

[5] Dr. B. Laufer, Curator of Anthropology, Field Columbian Museum, Chicago, in a note to the writer, Jan. 6, 1920.

[6] By the Rev. Thra Ba Ta, in a letter dated August 14, 1917.

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the western part of ancient China. The first part of the name, "Ch," means "people," and the latter part, "Yang," is the distinctive tribal name. Turning now to the Karen word "Pgha K'Nyaw." "Pgha" is a general word meaning people. "K'Nyaw" is, according to my informant, composed of two elements: "K'," a prefix often found in the names of tribes in the vicinity of Burma and denoting a tribal group, as "Kachin," "Kethe," or "Karok" (as used by the Talaing of the Chinese). "Nyaw" is derived from "Yang," referred to above. The final nasal "ng" is softened in Karen to the open syllable "aw," following the analogy of many words occurring in the dialects or in Burmese and having nasal endings; and "n" and "ny" are interchangeable. Thus, if this reasoning is correct, "Pgha K'Nyaw" is derived from the ancient "Yang," and is like the source from which the Burmese "Kayin" is derived.[7] This explanation affords another link connecting the Karen with the early dwellers within the confines of the present Chinese Republic.

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The language of the Karen, after being classed in various ways, has now been recognized as a Sinitic language and, according to the last Burma *Census* (1911) is set down as belonging to the "Siamese-Chinese" sub-family of the Tibeto-Chinese languages, being grouped with the Tai or Shan. I feel sure that this last grouping is subject to revision by the philologists. While at first glance the relationship of these languages appears to be remote, Major H. R. Davies makes a very pertinent statement when he says: "Doubtless owing to phonetic change and the splitting of initial double consonants, many words have been altered beyond all hope of recognition, but a systematic study of the subject would, I believe, reveal many unsuspected resemblances."[8]

When we consider that many of these languages have never been fixed by written characters and that, within the past few decades, the Karen language has so changed that the bard literature of a century ago is almost unintelligible to the present generation, we can see how complicated the problem is and that it is only capable of solution, if at all, at the hands of experts.

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The Karen language, as we now have it, is a monosyllabic agglutinated speech, with no final consonants in Sgaw Karen and with nasals and finals in other dialects. These are all marks of Sinitic

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[7] Martin in the *Lore of Cathay* gives the names of the other three of the four ancient tribes of China as the La in the North, the Yi in the East, and the Man in the South.
[8] Maj. H. R. Davies, *Yunnan, The Link between Burma and the Yangste.*

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period of less than three hundred years. This is doubtless much too low an estimate, unless it refers to the time of their domicile in the particular district now occupied.

In so far as we may venture a conclusion, it is that the Karen migrated into Burma, coming from the ancient home of the early tribes inhabiting the country of China, with whom they are related by tribal, linguistic, and possibly religious ties, the full significance of which are yet to be determined.

NOTE. Various Theories of the Origin and Tribal Relationships of the Karen.—From the middle of the nineteenth century many theories regarding the origin and racial affinity of the Karen have been propounded by writers on Burma. J. R. Logan, writing in 1850 in the *Journal of the Indian Archipelago* (Vol. IV, p. 478) connects this people with the tribes in the highlands of the Kolan and Irrawaddy and in the lower bend of the Brahmaputra. Writing again in the same *Journal* in 1858 (New Series, Vol. II, p. 387) Logan maintains that the Karen language is a dialect of the Irrawaddo-Brahmaputran dialect, affected by Chinese influence as it came south. Professor De Lacouperie in his introduction to Colquhoun's *Amongst the Shans* (pp. xxxviii, ff.) argues that the Karen are descended from the ancient Tek or Tok tribes of central Asia. Early missionaries and other writers, including Denniker. (*Races of Man*, p. 395) believed that the Kachin and Chin formed a branch of the Karen race. *The Archaeological Survey* of Burma has linked the Karen both with the ancient Kanran, one of the three primitive tribes mentioned in Burmese annals, and with the Miao and Yao of Yunnan (*Report* of 1916). But the Kanran were driven southwestward from the region around Prome and seem to have disappeared from history. (Phayre, *History of Burma*, pp. 5-19.) The linguistic differences between the Miao, Yao, and Karen have led to the abandonment of the idea that they are closely related. In fact, all of these views have been given up, because they were based on an inadequate knowledge of the tribes concerned.

Dr. Mason, in the *Journal, Asiatic Soc. of Bengal* (Vol. XXXVII, p. 162, 1868,) says that the first historical notice of the Karen is in Marco Polo's travels in the 13th Century. He quotes Malte Brun on the basis of Marco Polo's travels, as follows: " 'This country of Caride is the southeastern point of Tibet, and perhaps the country of the nation of the Cariaines; which is spread over Ava.' This statement is confirmed by old Bghai poetry in which we find incidentally mentioned the town of Bhamo to which they formerly were in the habit of going to buy axes and bills or cleavers, as they do now at Toungoo. When this poetry was composed they lived five hundred miles north of their present locality." These geographical allusions seem so vague that it appears to be impossible to build much of a theory upon them. Perhaps the lines referring to Bhamo may refer to a trading expedition and not to a line of migration. And the statement of Malte Brun is only conjecture at the most.

In their excellent work on *The Pagan Tribes of Borneo*, Hose and Mc-

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[20] J. O'Riley, *Journal, Indian Archipelago*, Vol. IV, N.S. (1859), p. 8.
[21] *Ibid.*

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Dougall say that "of all the tribes of the southwestern corner of the continent, the one which seems to us most closely akin to the Kayans [of Borneo] is that which comprises the several tribes of the Karen." (Vol. II, p. 235).

The similarity in culture and physical characteristics of the Kayan and Karen with some of the tribes of the Philippine Islands, *e. g.*, the Davao and Tinguian tribes, or between the Karen and certain of the Malays, is strong. The similarity of the name "Kayan" with that by which the Karen are known to the Burmans is also striking; but it seems fairly clear that if this accidental similarity of name did not exist, the Kayans would not have been considered closer than the Dyaks in kinship to the Karen. Dr. J. H. Vinton, who has had a life-long acquaintance with the Karen, thinks that they are resembled more by the Dyaks than by the Kayans. He expressed this view after a recent tour through Borneo. These similarities suggest that most of these tribes are not far removed from one another, and that they all belong to the Indo-Chinese stock, which, in turn, resembles the South China type, due no doubt to a common ancestry in the remote past.

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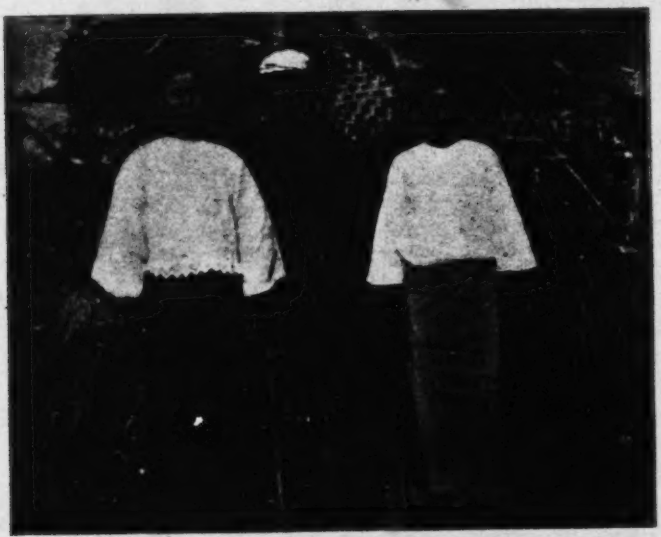

KAREN MEN FROM THE HILLS, THARRAWADDY DISTRICT
The second man from the left is a village chief or headman. The fourth is a plainsman, who is the teacher in Pankabin Village

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10. *Hsi hsa*, the month of a little starlight, when the stars begin to show themselves occasionally. It corresponds to the Burmese *Thadingyut* and to the moon of October.

11. *La naw*, the month of the "naw," when from the seeds of this small plant is extracted an oil much like sessimum oil. It is equivalent to the Burmese *Tezaungmon* and to the moon of November.

12. *La plü*, the month of eclipses, when the moon dies and hence the month for funeral ceremonies. It corresponds to the Burmese *Nadaw* and to the moon of December.

It will be noticed that in the list as given above the seventh and eighth months are numbered 6 and 7, respectively. Two suggestions have been made to explain this incongruity. One of these is Dr. Mason's suggestion to the effect that originally the first month was *La plü* (December), which would not only correct the incongruity, but also make the Karen calendar correspond to that of Tibet, which begins with December.[1] The other explanation was given to me by a Karen teacher, who says that the month of *La hkli* (April) is the one that is repeated every three years in order to correct the calendar, and that the periodic interposition of this extra month is responsible for the names of the seventh and eighth months and the disagreement of those names with their serial numbers in the list. To me this explanation seems very dubious. One Karen writer attempts to correct the incongruity between the seventh and eighth months and their serial numbers by proposing to transfer *La hkü* (August) from its generally accepted position in the list to a place before the seventh month, but, of course, this is not a feasible change. As many Karens associate the month for funeral ceremonies *(La plü)* with the end of the year, they do not think it should be shifted into first place in the calendar.

THE DAYS OF THE WEEK

Few of the Karen people can tell the days of the week, except according to Burmese or Christian nomenclature. Several old men have given me names for the days, which, they say, were in use a long time ago. There are seven of these, as may be seen in the following tabulation:

[1] *Journal, Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XXXVII, 42.

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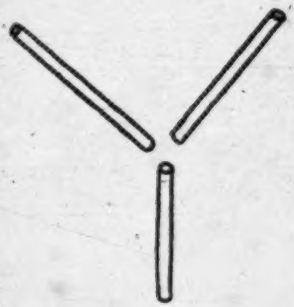
clear the sticks is regarded as a bad omen, showing that the spirit of the dead man has encountered some obstacle on its journey to its next abode. It is, therefore, incumbent on the jumper to try the center leap over again until he gets through safely.[1]

The next game in order is that of "pounding the pestles" ("ta to kli"). In this game three young men, each provided with a pestle or bamboo stick, take their places at equal intervals about a central spot on the ground, which forms the target at which they strike in turn. A fourth youth must jump first from one side and then another to the center and out again before each stroke falls, and the fourth time also when the wielders of the sticks strike together. In this game the jumper runs considerable risk of getting hit on the feet, unless he is very spry in his movements.



A third game with the pestles is called "stretching the neck" ("ta leh kah"). The four pestles required in this game are held in "criss-cross" fashion as in the first jumping game, but as high as one's shoulders. A young man stands beneath them, and another stands at one corner waving a naked sword above them. The four holding the ends of the pestles strike them together at brief intervals, while the youth beneath them must thrust his head up between the ends of the sticks and withdraw it again before they close about his neck, or the swinging sword touches him. Having done this on three sides in succession, the fourth time he must attempt it through the square in the middle. If he is successful in making the circuit three times without getting "his neck stretched," the assembled company are entitled to feel satisfied that it is well with the soul of the departed.

"Climbing the fruit tree" ("htaw the tha") is a very different kind of game from those described above, involving no physical risk inasmuch as it is a performance in pretending. A conventionalized picture of a tree with a knot part-way up the trunk, two

[1] Dr. Nieuwenhuis tells of a rice-pounder dance in Borneo performed by the women, who skip into the center and out again between the simultaneous strokes of the rice pestles. This dance is not unlike the funeral game described above. He also shows a picture of wrestling in Borneo, a sport evidently conducted like wrestling among the Karen. See plate 18, p. 137 of Dr. Nieuwenhuis's *Quer durch Borneo* (Leyden, 1907).

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ing the period when the "Law" are supreme, these divinities betake themselves to the clefts and fissures of the rocks on Mount "Thaw Thi"; but towards the end of the wet season they begin to gather their forces together for a mortal combat with their opponents. The flashing of spears is seen in the forked lightning, and the force of the blows exchanged is revealed in the roar of the thunder. The "Law hpo" are unable to hold out against the onslaught and withdraw for six months to the fissures and rifts in the rocks from which the "Hku de" came forth. A half-year later the "Law" will vanquish the present victors.

The "P'yo" are demons, usually in the form of dragons or serpents, that blow the water up from the ocean and produce the clouds from which the rain descends. They sometimes take on human form, and in this guise they figure in many Karen tales. They preside over the deep pools of streams, whose flow may otherwise be reduced to the merest trickle. The king of the crocodiles, "Maw law kwi," is said to be one of these demons.

Eclipses, like the clouds, are supposed to be caused by demons; but the eclipse-producing demons were once the dogs of a certain mythical personage who tried unsuccessfully to recover his stolen elixir of life from the moon. These dogs are "K' paw ta thu" and "T' hke mo bak." [13]

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There are other mythical beings of whom the Karen have more or less vague ideas, for example, the two daughters of "Y'wa" who came to earth in order to improve the condition of men. A prophet discovered their identity and urged the people to build a temple for their worship. The Pwo Karens not only failed to follow this advice, but also disregarded the proprieties so far as to begin pulling out their gold and silver hair ornaments. The goddesses became so disgusted with this rude treatment that they hastened back to their celestial abode, nevermore to be seen by mankind.

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A large group of malevolent beings, much feared by the Karen, are the "Ta na." These are witch-like in their operations, but possess the power to assume almost any form at will in order to harm mortals and are superhuman. They are not to be confused with the Burmese "nats," although they have certain resemblances to them.[14]

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[13] For the tale of the origin of eclipses see Chapter XI on Measures of Time and Space. Karen Astronomy, p. 59.

[14] See "Shwe Yoe" (Sir J. G. Scott), *The Burmese, His Life and Notions*, Chap. XXII, pp. 206, ff.

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CHAPTER XXVII

DIVINATIONS

Recourse is had to the bones of the fowl for prognosticating the future throughout many parts of southeastern Asia. In these regions the chicken is indigenous, and it may be that the custom of examining their bones came about in a natural way, as suggested by Sir J. G. Scott.[1] It would be natural for people entering a new country for the purpose of settling in it to take note of all indications as to its fertility, including the size and condition of the fowls. Perhaps this gives us the clue to the origin of the Karen practice of inspecting the holes of the thigh-bones of the fowl. The words designating this usage are "ka hsaw ki," which literally mean to break the fowl's bones. It may be that originally they actually broke the bones and examined their structure, strength, and condition to determine whether the fowls were well nourished or not, and that later the custom arose of inspecting only the holes in the bones. Why such a change should have taken place is without explanation, unless the people thought they had discovered a relation between the general healthiness of the bones and the pinholes along their sides.

The Karen people themselves connect the origin of this custom with the legends of their early golden age, before they had lost their book or "Mü kaw li" (Satan) had tempted their ancestors to disobey the eternal God, "Y'wa," and had then taught them divination. The story of the Lost Book is found among other peoples in this region of the earth and in brief is as follows: In the beginning "Y'wa" had seven sons, the eldest of whom was the Karen and the youngest, the white man. The father, being about to go on a journey, invited the Karen to accompany him; but the latter declined on the score that he had his field to clear. The Burman also refused to go. However, each of them gave "Y'wa" a gift, the Karen presenting him with a bamboo trough, such as the pigs feed out of, and the Burman, with a paddle.[2] The white brother was induced to accompany his father,

[1] Sir J. G. Scott, *Burma, A Handbook*, 399, ff.

[2] Another version of this myth says that the Karen gave "Y'wa" a "saw ku" or rain cover such as is worn when the people are transplanting rice in the rainy season.

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bones have been spat upon, rubbed with charcoal, scraped all over with a sickle, and the holes cleaned out. Sometimes the wing-bones are used, but not so generally as the thigh-bones.

Before preparing and eating the feasts in honor of the "Bgha," as has been pointed out elsewhere,[7] the gall-bladder of a pig is examined. If it is full and round, it is evident that the spirits will be pleased with the offering and that good fortune, health, and plenty will follow. This form of divination is common not only among the Karen, but also among the tribes of Malaysia and Borneo.[8]

On occasions of little consequence, and perhaps more often nowadays than formerly, the Sgaw resort to a form of divination in which a number of transverse marks are made at random with a piece of charcoal, which has been spat upon, on a stick of wood or a piece of bamboo. When the space allotted has been filled up, the marks are counted by twos. If it appears that an even number of marks has been made, the affair in hand will turn out well; if not, the same process is gone through a second time in the hope of securing a different result. In case this attempt also fails, the project is abandoned for the present. The use of the charcoal is reminiscent of the charred remains of the Lost Book.

A method that is sometimes used to discover the outcome of an illness may be described as follows. The diviner holds a fresh egg to his mouth, spits upon it, and says: "May this egg show us what is the cause of the illness. If due to the 'Bgha,' may the egg have white streaks on its yolk; if due to the 'th' re ta hka,' may it have red streaks on its yolk; if due to witchcraft, may the red streaks be mixed with blood." After rubbing the sick person with the egg, the elder breaks it open in the palm of his hand and carefully examines the yolk for one of the signs he has mentioned. If he observes any of these, he prescribes the offering to be made to the spirit concerned. If, however, the yolk discloses no particular marks, he repeats the operation and this time prays to "Pa'k' sa Y'wa" (Father God) to aid him: " 'Pa k sa Y'wa,' this man is sick. We do not know the reason for it. But you are in heaven and care for all of your children. As you have prophets, give them a word to say." Again the egg is rubbed over the sick person, broken open, and examined. A peculiar appearance of the contents, described to me as consisting of two points connected by fibres going around

[7] See Chapter XXIV on Feasts to the "Bgha," pp. 351, 352.
[8] For Borneo, see Hose & MacDougall, *The Pagan Tribes of Borneo*, Vol. II, 68, ff.

[See pp. 279-280, Cat. #16, Analyst.]

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CHAPTER XXVIII

TABU

As among the Polynesians and South Sea Islanders, so also among the Karen people, certain foods, animals, persons, places, days, names, etc., are temporarily or permanently prohibited under penalty of a curse falling upon those who disregard the tabu. Among the Karen such prohibitions ("tá dü ta htu") are most commonly associated with marriage, adultery, births, widows and orphans, portents, signs of bad luck, crops, certain domestic animals, the "Bgha" feasts, the names of persons, high waters, and the gathering of herbs for dyestuffs. The people's fear of offending powerful spirits and thereby bringing calamity upon themselves, is at the root of most, if not all, of these tabus, which serve to illustrate the fact that primitive man does not recognize broad principles of conduct, but depends on precepts covering specific experiences in his life. When asked why they do not do the tabued acts, most Karens content themselves with the reply, "Ta t' ghe ba" (It is not good). The observance of these prohibitions, which are usually accompanied by certain sacrifices or offerings, is a matter of custom that has descended from former generations.

It is evident that most of the tabus are related to the domestic life and the occupations of the people. Only in a few instances are they concerned with interests distinctly tribal. It was formerly the custom among the Red Karen for the mothers of prospective chiefs of the tribe, and for the chiefs themselves, to abstain from the use of rice and liquor.[1] The tabu on the eating of rice by these persons is difficult to explain; but we know that the Red Karen use rice less extensively than the inhabitants of the plains, yams and other roots constituting an important part of their diet. The suggestion has been made that the tabu on liquor drinking by the chiefs and their mothers, was for the purpose of promoting the clearness of mind so desirable in the leaders of the tribe; but it is truer to say that they believe that by ascetic practices one may gain unusual powers—perhaps magical—either for oneself or, in the case of the chief, for his people. When the Red Karen chiefs ob-

[1] *Upper Burma Gazetteer*, Vol. I, Part II, p. 201.

25; Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 APl Burma
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K 101 131
K [361]

881. KAREN VILLAGE.

K 241

in small numbers, chiefly as pilgrims to the Buddhist shrines, of which the chief is the Shwe Dagôn, in Rangoon (p. 188).

The Karéns are the most important hill-race of the country, and best exemplify the mode of life of the quasi-aboriginal tribes, whom Burmans, Taláings, and Shans have kept out of the plain-land. The "white Karéns," Sghaw (*Sgkrraw*) and Pwo, occupy the mountains between Burma and Siam. They have colonies in mountains far to the east and west, and have also spread into the plains adjoining. They call themselves *Baganyáw* (*Bgkrraganyáw*), and call the Burmans *Bayáw*. The Burmans call them *Kayín*, and familiarly *Tha-ngè-dyín*—play-mate, in much the same way as we say "Jack Burman" and "John Chinaman." The Karéns get their living by making hill-forest clearings (*taungya*), on which they raise one crop, and remove to fresh sites every season.

K 177

On the fringe of the mountain tracts the Karéns are more or less Burmanized, and practise Buddhism, being attracted by the prestige of the religion, with its great festivals in which everyone is free to share—especially now that they can mingle in the towns without fear of their quondam oppressors. The barbarous *thgwin*, which the Burmans themselves are beginning to disuse, is one of the first marks of the contact of the Karén with the dominant race. The Karéns settled in the lowlands are known as Taláing-Kayín, and Bamá-Kayín. The men know Burmese, and dress like Burmans.

K [854]

K 181

The Karén is noted for truthfulness and chastity. The former characteristic is probably to be accounted for by absence of coercive *régime*, their society being, as Macpherson says of the Khonds, pervaded by

882. KAREN MOTHER AND BABE.

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Karenni
Chin AP5

The Karenni, or "Red

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K [524]

348. KAREN HOOP-GAME.

Karéns," have a language of Karén structure, but the people recall the truculent Kachín much more than the mild Karén. They inhabit a plateau about half the size of Wales, lying between the northern limit of the White Karéns and the southern limit of Shans and Kachíns. The *Karenni* are darker-skinned than the Karéns. They use red and black colours in their clothing; the men wear short pants, sleeveless Shan jackets, and a red *gaung-baung*. The women wear a black cloth, somewhat after the manner of the Siamese women; they do most of the labour, even the tilling of the rice-fields, which are on the Shan model; but *taungya* is practised also. They brew a liquor from millet-corn, which the men always carry in their gourd. The villages are permanent, situated on points of vantage, and are stockaded. Feuds between villages are chronic and form the chief concern of the male population. Such of the Karenni as settle in the lowlands adopt the Shan civilisation and dress.

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The Chins are believed by some to represent the stock from which the Burman tribes originated, and to have descended into the valley of the Irawadi from the plateau of Tibet, with the inhabitants of which the Burmans and Chins possess linguistic affinities not shared by other races of the Peninsula. The Chins are the hill-people of the mountains west of the Irawadi and its great tributary the Chindwin. The tribes are many and diverse. Towards the south and on the borders of the plains they are Burmanised in a great measure, and have dropped their primitive characteristics, notably their language. They call themselves Ashō. The black tattooing of the women's faces, which is the most distinctive of

K [286]

349. KAREN WOMAN WEAVING.

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342 Inside, one first enters a room, on the left side of which, against the wall, stands a Buddha altar. This serves as a reception room. On the right side are the fireplace and the kitchen utensils. Behind this, the left part of the house is partitioned into two bedchambers. The right part of the house serves as a shed for agricultural implements and mat supplies. It does not have a raised floor on piles.

Figure 6 shows the interior of a modest Taungyo village house in Myinka (north of Kalaw). It has a length of about 12 meters, a width of 8 1/2 meters and a height of 4 1/2 meters. Three rows of posts, about 2 1/2 meters apart, carry the roof. On the inside, the space in front of the first row of posts is used as a shelter for buffaloes or oxen, and also for rice provisions which are stored here in large baskets. Half of the width of the hut, behind the first row of posts, serves as a workshop /215/ where the husking of rice, etc. is done. The other half, built on a pile substructure, about 1 meter high, is used as living and sleeping quarters. A few steps lead to a platform with a railing. At the side of the platform by the wall, stands a rack for Buddha pictures and flower vases, while at the side facing the interior is the fireplace and next to it a structure for storing cooking utensils, etc. A bamboo mat wall separates the tiny bedrooms. The space under the rounded rear awning is used as a shed for roofing grass supplies, agricultural implements, etc.

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•101 The Karen tribes which belong linguistically to the Sino-Siamese group, live in lower Burma from the Mergui Archipelago to Toungoo. In the west they extend as far as the eastern slopes of the Arakan Yoma, and in the east to the Salween, in the southwestern part of the Shan States and
K Karenni States--1911: 1,102,695. Large groups
[177] of them are already more or less Burmanized in their clothing and customs. Many of them have

101 Many of them [i.e. Karen, Analyst] have Karen AT 7
[797] embraced Buddhism and more especially Christianity. The American Baptist Mission has been most successful among them and draws trainees for the missionary and teaching profession from the Karen. In the distant hill districts the tribes can still be found in their original civilization. There they still build their crude bamboo
[342] huts, often one for several families (21). The

21. Ferrars, ibid., p. 149.

Karenni (meaning red Karen) who live beyond the British administration zone, but still under British control, live together with a few kindred tribes in a separate little state in the southeast corner of the Southern Shan States--1911: 19,008. They are, without question, least touched by civilization. Christianity has won
[771] over only a few converts among them; the demon cult is still the predominant religion. The tall
361 masts, which are erected at sowing and harvesting
[782] time as sacrificial posts for the spirits, indicate from afar the proximity of a Karenni village. A sturdy fence of bamboo wickerwork usually encloses the village itself, and most of the time /Figure 6--Interior of a Taungyo house in Myinka, near Kalaw./ the individual houses are also
343 fenced in (Plate VII, 1). The grain sheds, which are small pile structures, stand some distance away, usually outside the village fence because of fire hazard. This is a custom which can be observed among all Indochinese mountain tribes. This practice is all the more surprising since in the days when raids, robberies, and tribal feuds were very frequent just the most valuable possessions were kept outside the fort-like village enclosures. The grain sheds were secured only by a wooden bar and were accessible to everybody; it was even customary to keep also other valuable
343 possessions in these huts. However, the grain shed
778 seems to have been revered as holy; it is said that

342 The houses of the Padaung, another Karen tribe--1911: 8,516--are quite similar. The
[301] Padaung women represent an amusing ethnographical parallel to the African Massai, with their solid heavy brass ornaments and their tremendous collars. Sometimes the Padaung form a village
[621] community together with the Yimbaw-Karen (24)

24. About Yimbaw-Karen see UBG, I, 1, p. 524.

as in the villages of Naungswe near Mobye on the Nam Pilu. The place looked cleaner to me than the Karenni villages and their houses were better constructed (Plate VII, 3). A round awning covers the veranda; the single inside room is used for cooking, living, and sleeping. In
[354] the center are two fireplaces which are sunk into the floor; on both sides are sleeping accommodations. Alongside the wall the floor is raised to form a low platform where vessels and all sorts of implements are kept. At the rear, to
[514] the right, a bamboo screen, reaching half way to the ceiling, partitions off a kind of toilet which is an opening in the floor.

● 101 The Gaungto--(Sawng-tung-Zayein-) Karen--
161 1911: 4,981--belong to a tribal group where
582 more or less severe endogamic marriage rules limit the establishment of families, and this in turn has resulted in a steady decrease of the population. Consequently, one frequently finds in their villages a large number of old maids and bachelors who were unable to find suitable mates for themselves. For example, I counted in one little village, consisting only of six houses, not more than four married couples, and their families. In addition, there was one widow, and four girls and four bachelors who, because of lack of money or because of the marriage rules, had to remain single.

344 The bachelor house, a customary institution
883

2. Karen

101 The Karen dialects are spoken in Lower Burma and the
197 Shan States. Our studies of Karen are still in a preliminary stage, but enough work has been done to show that this family represents an archaic offshoot from the Tibeto-Burman stock. The present position of the Karen groups, in the lower Salween valley and the Salween-Mekong divide, suggests that the Karen became detached from the main body of Tibeto-Burman-speaking peoples at a relatively early date and migrated southward, probably via the Salween valley, at a period considerably antedating that of the general Burmish-Lolcish expansion. At present the Karen are hemmed in on all sides by groups speaking quite distinct languages, viz. the Tibeto-Burman-speaking Burmese and Southern Lolo, the Thai-speaking Shan, and the Mon-Khmer-speaking [illegible] and Palaung. The Mon, also of Mon-Khmer stock, must have exerted considerable influence on the Karen at a somewhat earlier period.

193 Karen agrees with Chinese and Thai, and sharply differs
197 from Tibeto-Burman, in placing the object after rather than before the verb. It is on the basis of this feature, and of this feature alone, that Karen has generally been grouped with Chinese and Thai. On the lexical side, however, Karen is basically affiliated with Tibeto-Burman, though it has developed a considerable body of distinctive roots of its own and occasionally shows some affinity for Chinese, e.g. the Karen root *su "hand" corresponds to Chinese shou (手). The